Paul

(fl. 469)

BRIEFING

Paul (or Paul comes) was a high-ranking Roman official or soldier in the 5th century, with the rank of Comes, freely translated as count. As historical figure he is difficult to place, because the information that has been preserved about him is unclear. In addition to a comes Paul who operated in Gaul, there is also a comes Paul in Italy, the brother of Orestes. It is possible that this is one and the same person.

HISTORY

Paul's life can only be reconstructed on basis of vague sources and interpretation. He was titled *comes* (literally "companion"), which refers to a high military or civil position in late Roman times. Comes Paul lived during a turbulent period in history in which the West Roman Empire was plagued by rebellions of the army and of barbarian groups such as the Goths, Vandals, Suevens, Burgundians and Franks. Roman authority was gradually eroded, especially in Africa, Spain, Britannia, and Gaul. Various groups and local rulers tried to maintain the authority of Rome or went their own way.

Around 470 Paul was active in Gaul, when the information of Gregory of Tours is correct about him. It is unclear on whose side he acted, he may have been on the hand of Aegidius, the independent ruler of Gaul, but he may just as well have acted on behalf of the Roman emperor in Ravenna. Emperor Anthemius (467-472) is known to have made attempts to restore imperial authority in Gaul. The emperor tried to form an alliance against Eurik, king of the Goths, in which Riothamus was also involved. These events would have brought Paul into conflict with Chilperic the general who succeeded Aegidius as commander of the Gallic army.

The Paul who has been mentioned as the brother of Orester has to deal with the rebellion of the army by Odoaker in 476. He initially remained out of fire in Ravenna, but was captured by ship in an escape attempt and then executed.

SOURCES AND INTERPRETATION

Gregory of Tours mention in his history of the Franks, Book II, episode 18, shows that Paul died shortly after the battle of Deols of 469-471 at the Loire.

> «*The Bretons were expelled from Bourges by the Goths, who killed a large number of them at the village of Dol. Count Paul, together with the Romans and the Franks, waged war against the Goths, on whom he made great loot. When Adovacre had come to Angers, King Childerik arrived the next day, and after Count Paul was killed, he conquered the city. That day the church was destroyed by a large fire. (translation François Guizot)*

The bishop of Tours wrote his Histories a hundred years later. In this episode, Paul is a Roman commander who led the army of the Romans and Franks against the Goths and made a great loot. Then Gregory reports in an unclear phrase that a certain Odoaker goes up to Angers and that the next day Childeric arrives, and after he killed comes Paul the city was conquered. Also according to the *Chronicon Cassiodori* (probably written at the court of Odoacer by Cassiodorus) Paul and Orester were murdered by Odoaker, the rebel leader, but that is in 476. The disadvantage of Gregory's history is that the writer is not always precise and reliable and that it was recorded a hundred years after the events.